



Tom Branson, left, and Tony Kloppenborg, right, make up the western Illinois habitat strike team.

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Teaming Up for Habitat

By Jake Vancil, IRAP Coordinator

Many times the difference between success and failure is a great team. Andrew Carnegie once said, "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results." That is what is happening with the Illinois Recreational Access Program's (IRAP) habitat strike teams.

With more than 16,400 acres enrolled in the IRAP program, an aggressive approach was needed to assist with the management of these properties, thus unique partnerships were kindled and two unique IRAP habitat strike teams were established.

IDNR and Pheasants Forever (PF) have had a long term partnership working on private property toward common goals. It was a perfect fit to work with PF on creating a habitat strike team. The crew consists of Tom Branson, Habitat

Strike Team Coordinator, and Tony Kloppenborg, Habitat Strike Team Technician. Jake Vancil, the IRAP Coordinator, works closely with this strike team to accomplish boots on the ground management. Jake has worked with several state programs and has had a wide range of experience on forest resource management.

Since the inception of the PF/IRAP habitat team in June 2016, they have managed 2,907 acres, created 8 miles of burn breaks for prescribed fire and built 2 duck blinds for IRAP participants to waterfowl hunt.

The team covers several counties in western Illinois on IRAP leased properties and quail/pheasant focus areas. Along with the strike team, IRAP also has a college intern once a year that joins the crew during the summer for college credit and hands on, in the field experience. These interns acquire a great wealth of knowledge working hands on in real



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Habitat strike team success!

stand improvement, prescribed fire, prairie planting, backpack spraying and brush management.

Both of these partnerships create unique and great opportunities for these habitat teams to work with private landowners to help improve their property for a healthier forest and wildlife habitat. These crews are also part of an ongoing data collection study of aerial spraying for bush honeysuckle across the state. With the help of Bob Caveny, they have also set up 225 test plots on IRAP landowner properties and collect data of before and after the aerial spraying. This is a fairly new technique that is being used as an initial strike to manage for bush

world situations. In fact, last year their intern got “Intern of the Year” from Illinois College!

Another great partnership that IRAP has acquired is with the Natural Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC). Through this partnership, IRAP was able to hire another habitat strike team consisting of Brian Stoff, Habitat Project Coordinator and Eric Wright, Habitat Senior Project Assistant. Each Spring/Summer NGRREC has also hires a short term habitat junior assistant position to support upcoming spring burns. Under the guidance of Phil Cox, IRAP Forester, this habitat strike team has also conducted several thousand of acres of habitat management. Phil is a Southern Illinois University of Carbondale graduate with a bachelor’s in Forestry and a minor in Plant and Soil Science. He has extensive experience working with state and federal programs and also to management techniques that go along with them.

Like Pheasants Forever, NGRREC also runs an internship program every year that provides hands on experience and guidance to college students for real world training. This coming spring, two interns, through Lewis and Clark Community College’s Restoration Ecology Program, will be assisting the strike team with day-to-day habitat management activities for 10 hours a week during the spring semester. Some of the habitat improvements consist of invasive species removal, fire line creation, timber



Habitat strike team conducting woodland controlled burn along previously made firebreak.



IRAP habitat strike teams are equipped with a trailer, ATV, sprayers, and other tools necessary to get the job done.



honeysuckle and so far we are getting very good results. In addition, both NGRREC interns, will be conducting avian and vegetation response research associated with the IDNR's aerial honeysuckle spraying. The strike teams have been very successful in providing a fantastic opportunity for college students to get much-needed hands-on experience.

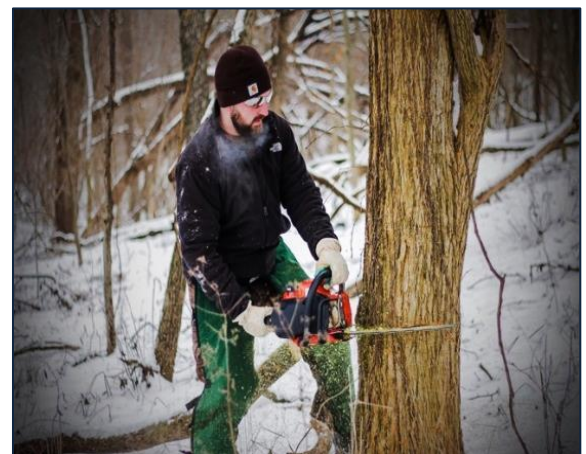
The Illinois Recreational Access Program is not only geared toward providing more hunters and outdoor enthusiast access but also the overall health and quality of Illinois' forest and wildlife. Through these efforts we are making a difference by helping the public and private land owners alike. Without the success of these habitat strike teams, a lot less would have been accomplished.

With a large majority of land in Illinois privately owned, it can be difficult for hunters and outdoor enthusiasts to find a place to recreate. The Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP) is a program designed to help with this issue. Since its inception in 2011, IRAP has enrolled over 16,400 acres of private land for various recreational opportunities throughout the state. IRAP works closely with private landowners to help enhance their property with invasive removal and other habitat improvements in exchange for allowing these activities to take place on their land.

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." --Helen Keller



Eric Wright, left and Jake Vancil right, working on mopping up after a prescribed burn on IRAP leased property



Phil Cox, IRAP Forester cuts an undesirable Osage Orange tree